

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Title of Project	Deaf Development Programme
Project location	Number of communities, number of dioceses, and/or country.
Implementing Partner/s:	Maryknoll Cambodia
Program Duration	1/07/2017 – 30/06/2021
Total Program Budget	\$640,000.00
Evaluator	Sr. Leonor Montiel, MM External Evaluator
Date of Evaluation	28 October -1 November 2019
Total local downstream partners and name	N/a

PROJECT/PROGRAM/ORGANIZATION OVERVIEW

The Deaf Development Program has been funded by Caritas Australia since 2008, with the project beginning in 2002. and implemented by partner organisation Maryknoll Cambodia. The project aims to remove the barriers preventing deaf people in Cambodia from accessing fulfilling employment and social opportunities. It enables participants to have a meaningful contribution to Cambodian society, empowering them to become agents of their own change and gain the confidence, wellbeing and financial security to lead their lives with dignity. The project works with deaf youth and adults in Phnom Penh city, Kampong Cham and Kampot provinces and provides them with access to sign language classes, basic education services, vocational training courses, employment, business support, and Khmer sign language interpreting services.

The overall project objective is to integrate deaf people into Cambodian society by empowering them in the areas of education, income generation and communication. It has three specific outcomes:

- Deaf people are able to read and write Khmer language as well as communicate in sign language.
- Livelihood of deaf people is supported through DDP's services of job training, employment and business assistance.
- Deaf people have access to social activities via professional sign language interpreting services

PURPOSE and METHODOLOGY OF EVALUATION

The purpose of the evaluation was to look at the impact and best practices of the Deaf Development Program to the deaf and the deaf community in order to help the project team with its strategic planning.

The main methodology of the evaluation was to conduct interviews with the immediate past graduates of the project in their home and/or work setting, as well as some staff, employers and family of the deaf graduates. The evaluation was conducted by a Maryknoll Sister, who is also the country representative of Maryknoll Cambodia though not directly engaged in the project. 61 individual interviews and site/home visits were conducted with past students, current employers and partner organisation. Interviews were conducted in the homes of the graduates, and work places were also visited, allowing the evaluator to assess the living situation of the graduates and giving a better understanding of the locale, physical, social, and economic context of the participants and coverage of the project. Additionally, 3 focus group discussions were held with project staff, current students, and local authorities.

The evaluation report notes there were a number of important limitations. Firstly, the evaluation and Term of Reference was negotiated hurriedly. Fieldwork was also conducted in a very limited period of time (five days) and it quickly became apparent that the scope of the evaluation was too large, and it was impractical and unrealistic to reach within the timeframe. Due to the short lead time given for preparing the evaluation, staffing and geographical constraints, participants selected were not chosen randomly, but rather by project staff. As a result, it is likely that the more “successful” ones have been chosen, by virtue of a more stable home or work environment made it is easier to track them down. For all these limitations, the evaluator notes that they believe the stories of change garnered provide the evaluation valuable insights on the impact, reality and sustainability of the results of project on the lives of the deaf participants after they graduated from the program.

KEY FINDINGS

The evaluation found that the project has been successful to a certain extent in achieving its mission that the deaf people are empowered to develop their education, language, employment and community, as well as to raise awareness and understanding of deafness, deaf people and their culture within Cambodian society. The success is mostly on the individual level and still has to progress towards a communal level. Individually, graduates of the project have achieved a degree of self-agency and belongingness in their family and community. Largely, this success is also dependent on the stability of the family and the support they provide to the deaf family member.

The evaluation found that the most significant impact of the project is opening the deaf young adults to a world of opportunities, knowledge, skills, connectedness and belongingness. The project has provided the deaf a self-realisation and self-agency that most of them did not consider possible before going through the program. Likewise, the project has helped family and people around the deaf to recognise deaf peoples’ capacity and capability. Literacy, numeracy, learning life-skills and vocational skills are other major impacts that the project has had on the lives of the deaf young adults and by extension to their families and community.

The objective of forming a National Deaf Association is largely not realisable yet, due to the lack of readiness in skills, as well as a wider sense of community among the deaf. This lack of readiness on communal level is largely impacted and influenced by the realities of Cambodian life and not necessarily

a deficiency of the project. What might be possible is for the project to eventually metamorphose into a National Deaf Association. Currently, the project has identified some future deaf leaders from its youth camp but some of the most qualified and skilled deaf in the country are currently on staff at Maryknoll Cambodia.

LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The evaluation report notes that it is important to highlight that the impact of the project on the deaf, their family and community is highly affected by Cambodian reality, culture and beliefs. Cambodia remains a poor country with poor quality infrastructures, health, education and economic system, despite its lower-middle income country status.

It is difficult for majority of the Cambodians to earn and sustain a living, to go and stay in school, more so with the deaf graduates. The majority of Cambodians live in rural areas, hardly accessible by roads, dependent on agriculture to earn a living, and establishing a shop is hardly profitable. This is more so with the deaf graduates when they start their barber, sewing or beauty shops in their rural villages. This also makes it difficult for the deaf to attend Deaf Community Development activities and linked in person rather than virtually. Culturally, despite some progress, Cambodians still view women and those with disability inferior to others. This belief hinders the progress of women and people with disability, doubly so for women with disability.

The evaluation report provided a number of recommendations. In regards to education, it is recommended that workshops on health, hygiene, gender at the Deaf Development Community Centres, while helpful, are often one-time activities, and participants soon forget what they learn. Soft-skills such as relating with others, being on time, cooperating, etc. are also areas that graduates need to improve. Considering this, soft skills and health education should be strengthened. Health education and soft skills could be added as a regular part of the 2-year general education.

Regarding the approach to training deaf youth in residential centres vis a vis family and/or community-based development, while the residential centres were reported as a key factor to the success of the project, they are also considered institutionalised care and are counter to the family-based and community-based development that has been shown to be better for the development of children and vulnerable population. The Cambodian Ministry of Social Affairs, Veteran and Youth had also been implementing a reintegration and de-institutionalization action plan for those who are in residential or institutional care.

The report recommends that the project can strengthen development activities with the family and local community of the deaf, so that they are able to stay in their communities. This may include working with the local school to help integrate a deaf student in school well. There could also be more deaf awareness raising and sign language classes for the villagers and family, advocacy activities among the community members rather than just the authorities. However, the report also notes that this family and community-based approach is highly affected by the broader Cambodian societal reality including economics, culture, infrastructure, etc that maybe beyond the project's scope of impact and influence.

Finally, regarding the forming of a National Association of the Deaf, the evaluation found that the deaf community is not ready to form a deaf association, much more a national deaf association. Hence, the project may consider transitioning from an NGO program into an association of the deaf who will

provide the services the project is now providing. Leadership can be developed both from the current project deaf staff members as well as identified from among the deaf in the larger community.

MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

Forthcoming